

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

July 2009

INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF SAFEGUARDING

LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME : Corporate Parenting: Safeguarding

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with a quarterly update on Young People's access to Independent Advocacy

2. Background

- 2.1 Independent Advocacy for looked after young people, care leavers and other users of Children's Social Care Services during 2008-2009 has been provided under a contract with Action for Children
- 2.2 The contract has been extended to the end of March 2010 within the provisions of the original contract.
- 2.3 The statutory framework for this provision and eligibility for the service is as described in reports to the Board in June and September 2008

3 The Service

- 3.1 Action for Children provide the service 52 weeks of the year, with a telephone messaging service to receive inquiries outside office hours
- 3.2 Action for Children provides a choice of Independent Advocates who have a range of background professional experience in Social Work or social care, education and health. They maintain a sufficient pool of advocates to allocate according to the skill and knowledge needed and where appropriate, gender, to suit the circumstances of the young person requiring the service.

4 Service use and outcomes

- 3.1 The final out-turn for service take-up for 2008 – 2009 was 20 young people

- 3.2 Not all young people wishing to raise concerns make use of the service. Sometimes young people decline the offer of an advocate, feeling they have had made their representations clearly enough, sometimes supported by carers or the Young People's Officer.
- 3.3 All of the issues picked up by the Advocacy Service for the young people have been substantial and frequently complex. One case included the provision of independent legal advice for a young person.
- 3.4 Recurrent themes have been used to inform service development. Issues have been fed back to service areas via the Advocacy Monitoring Group, which includes representations from all Children's Social Care services and the Change Council. Examples include further discussions about service improvement between Change and managers of the Leaving Care Service, and, the development of additional arrangements for advocacy for young people with learning disabilities (described in section 5 below)

4 Accessing the Service

- 4.1 Allocation of advocates continues to be rapid, and well within the 5 working days of referral as required in the service specification and usually within 24/48 hours.
- 4.2 For most young people accessing the service, the main route is through referrals facilitated by the Young People's Officer where they are considering making a representation or complaint. Young people approaching the Complaints Manager directly are offered referral to the service. Direct referrals continue to be rare, although further promotion of the service, including providing contact details in the new 'Change News' magazine will be continued.
- 4.3 Referral rates in the current financial year are so far low in comparison to 2008-09,

5 Young People with Learning Disabilities

- 5.1 Analysis of referrals over the past 2 years has identified a number of young people with Learning Disabilities who were wholly dependant upon referrals via professionals and the Young People's Officer.
- 5.2 Action for Children are to undertake a pilot programme in consultation with Services for Disabled Children to provide direct outreach to young people with

learning disabilities. This is an area of work which is poorly represented nationally.

5.3 The pilot programme will be funded within the existing contract value, with additional resources generated by Action for Children. has the potential to be a national example of good practice.

5.4 The project has two main elements:

5.4.1 A Participation Worker who will engage with children with learning disabilities via their special schools. This will help to raise awareness and also will help to overcome the additional difficulty that these young people take longer to engage with an advocate when they need one.

5.4.2 The second element is to develop practice in 'Non-Instructed Advocacy' using models of good practice in providing advocacy for people who are unable to express concerns due to communication or learning disabilities

5.5 The project will focus initially on those young people who are looked after, since parental consent will be required for those children for whom the local authority does not have a corporate parenting role.

5.6 Action for Children has agreed to this additional work being undertaken within the existing contract value and has brought additional resources to the project.

5.7 Progress will be monitored quarterly via the Advocacy Monitoring Group meetings

6 Contract Review

6.1 New Contract Monitoring arrangements have been put in place by the Quality Assurance Officer to ensure continued service monitoring, in addition to the quarterly Monitoring Group Meetings

6.2 The current contract extension expires in March 2010. Arrangements will be necessary to seek new bids for the provision of the service beyond 2010 and the procurement preparation process will begin in the next three months.

7 Summary:

6.1 The Independent Advocacy Service has seen an increasing rate of take-up by our young people and meets all current statutory standards although the referral rate has dropped in the last three months

6.2 Work has commenced to establish a more pro-active arrangement for young people with Learning Disabilities

7 Recommendation

The Board is requested to note the continuing development of the arrangements and the extension of the contract, and to continue to receive quarterly reports.